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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

September 27, 1933 S. Department of Agriculture

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SUBJECT: "COMMUNITY CANNING." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Time skipped along so fast during our talk yesterday that we only had a brief moment to mention community canning--one of the new cooperative ideas which many neighborhoods and communities have worked out in their live-at-home programs for saving food for winter. Many times individual families have plenty of food to can but are unable to afford the necessary canning equipment. So they have hit upon the very sensible plan of joining with their neighbors and purchasing and using the equipment together. Other groups in many parts of the country have been canning together for relief work--putting up surplus food from their gardens for those who will need food during the coming winter.

Some communities are going into this kind of food conservation in a big way. They have put men and women to work in the community canneries, providing employment for the jobless and thousands of cans of fruits and vegetables for relief work next winter. The cost per can of food put up in this organized way is small. The fresh fruits and vegetables come from community gardens or are donations from farmers of their surplus bushels that won't sell.

But sometimes when people with no experience in canning start right off on a large scale, they don't realize how they have to watch every step. They don't realize that canning is the science of bacteriology applied to foods. It is heating foods to kill the bacteria that makes spoilage, and then sealing the can airtight so no more bacteria or other invisible organisms can get to the foods. Canning is easy when you understand the theory behind it. But to be a successful canner, you need to be as careful and precise in your work as a trained nurse when she's sterilizing the surgeon's implements after an operation. Like the canner, she is also outwitting dangerous bacteria.

Many of these groups of community canners have been writing the Bureau of Home Economics for advice on their canning problems. So here are a few do's and don'ts from the specialists in reply to all these questions.

Point 1. Use only fresh sound fruits and vegetables for canning. If a tomato has a bad spot, throw away the whole tomato. Even though you cut out the bad spot, the part that looks good may be filled with the troublesome bacteria, and you run the risk of infecting the whole lot. One community cannery had an unfortunate experience as a result of this very thing. One canner in her desire to be thrifty and use up a few imperfect tomatoes spoiled hundreds of jars. Never try to salvage half-spoiled fruits and vegetables in canning. It won't work.

Point 2. If you possibly can, follow the rule of two hours from garden to can. This is especially important with starchy vegetables like corn, peas and lima beans. If they stand overnight and the weather is warm, they may start



to develop a kind of spoilage called flat sour. Also the longer these vegetables stand, the more sweetness they lose. Their sugar changes to starch on standing in a warm place. So don't pick your vegetables one day and can them the next. If you want best results, do both jobs on the same day.

Point 3. Be sure you have jars or cans that you can seal airtight. Perhaps you think mentioning this is unnecessary because everyone knows it. But we have a letter from a mid-western city where they're running a big community cannery. Someone gave them a present of thousands of mayonnaise jars with the kind of covers that go with such jars. They canned apples and tomatoes in these jars and they all spoiled simply because the covers weren't sealed tight--couldn't seal airtight. For marmalade or preserve or pickles, these containers would have been all right. But not for canned goods.

Point 4. Use the hot pack method of filling the fruits and vegetables into the containers. For example, if you're canning tomatoes, cut them into quarters, and bring them to the boiling point in an open kettle. Then pack them boiling hot into the cans and put them into the canner to process. And by the way, don't try to make too solid a pack. Put in plenty of juice and give it room to circulate inside the cans as they are processing. This helps the heat to penetrate to the very center of the cans and sterilize the food thoroughly. I know of one woman who didn't understand this. She even took a potato masher and packed down sweet corn into her cans--packed it down as solid as she could. You can imagine the result. Corn cut from the cob is bound to make a thick pasty mass, difficult for heat to penetrate at best. It needs a loose pack.

Point 5. Divide your fruits and vegetables into lots which you can handle conveniently at one time with the equipment you have. In other words don't pack more jars than the canner can hold and then let them stand before processing. That's just an invitation to the bacteria to get busy. They like nothing better than nice warm surroundings. It speeds up their growth tremendously. You'll be far safer to carry your canning straight through in small batches.

Point 6. Be sure you make a record of each batch, how long you processed it, the day you canned it, and all such points. Then, if something goes wrong, you can probably put your finger on the trouble. In a community cannery, have a responsible timekeeper who does nothing but watch the processing. And be sure she follows a reliable time table. In processing fruits and tomatoes in the boiling water bath, you start counting time when the water boils up vigorously around the jars--not a minute before. With the pressure canner, you don't count time until the pressure guage registers 10 pounds or whatever pressure your directions call for.

Point 7--And perhaps the most important of all. Process all non-acid vegetables--that is corn, beans, peas, and practically all vegetables except tomatoes in the steam pressure canner. The bacteria in these non-acid vegetables are regular die-hards. They can even withstand boiling for quite a long while. So unless you can process these vegetables in a steam pressure canner, don't try to can them.

Well, there are seven points, just a few of the many to watch for in canning. If you want help on any kind of canning or preserving food, write to the Bureau of Home Economics at Washington, D.C. They have some special directions for community canneries, for community sewing rooms doing relief work, and they also have some low-cost food budgets for relief organizations.

Tomorrow: "Homemade Clothes."

